

CORONA/[REDACTED]/IDEALIST/TACKLE/OXCART

Copy No. [REDACTED] of 60

HANDLE VIA [REDACTED]/TALENT-KEYHOLE/
COMINT CONTROL SYSTEMS JOINTLY

Memorandum to Holders
USIB-D-41.14/288
(COMOR-D-25/212)
22 March 1966
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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

MEMORANDUM FOR HOLDERS OF USIB-D-41.14/288

SUBJECT : Requirement for High Resolution Photographic
Coverage of South China and North Vietnam

REFERENCE : USIB-D-41.14/288 (COMOR-D-25/212)
17 March 1966, Special Limited Distribution

1. The following is a record of the discussion of the subject at the 17 March 1966 meeting of the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) which was circulated for information and should be appended to the reference document.

2. The Chairman, Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance (COMOR) introduced the subject by stating the Committee had examined the problems as directed by the Board in USIB-D-41.14/286 and that a briefing would be presented to outline the considerations taken into account by COMOR in reaching their conclusions and recommendations regarding the requirement for employment of OXCART over South China and North Vietnam.

3. [REDACTED] began by displaying a map showing target distribution and priorities in South China and North Vietnam with particular attention to the main access routes from China into the Hanoi area that might indicate changes in the ChiCom military posture. He continued by showing two overlays, the first demonstrating the projected orbits of [REDACTED]

This chart illustrated the coverage that
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4. [REDACTED] next presented climatic studies of South China and North Vietnam which indicate we can expect 8 to 15 days with less than 25% cloud cover west of 107° longitude and 3 to 5 days east in April, 6 to 9 west and 3 to 5 east in May and dropping off to less than 3 west and less than 1 east in June. [REDACTED] pointed out that the period of June through August was the worst time of the year for weather in the area, while from September on through December the weather continues to improve. [REDACTED] said, however, that a quick reaction capability that would permit utilizing a 12 hour weather forecast would enhance the possibility of successful reconnaissance of the area during any short period of cloud-free weather, even during June through August.

5. [REDACTED] then presented a series of charts which reflected the vulnerabilities of the U-2 as compared with the OXCART to SA-2s and the MIG-21 from computer simulations of the technical capabilities of the various systems. He pointed out that the results were the upper boundaries of ChiCom and North Vietnam technical capabilities to counter the aircraft and that these results did not include degradations due to poor maintenance or low level of operator training. The results obtained indicated that MIG-21 variants in Communist China had a very low kill probability against U-2s and that the MIG-21 variant in North Vietnam had a slightly better capability. The U-2s were considerably more vulnerable to the SA-2s. On the other hand, the MIG-21s had no capability against the OXCART, while the capability of the SA-2s against OXCART, with its speed, high altitude [REDACTED] was practically zero. In answer to questions, [REDACTED] said the results of the studies would not recommend use of the U-2 in the SAM defended areas around Hanoi.

6. [REDACTED] finally showed a map of South China and North Vietnam with overlays of the typical manner of covering the COMOR priority

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targets with U-2 and OXCART in South China and OXCART in North Vietnam. He indicated that the U-2, if flown on a zig zag pattern to reduce the chances of MIG-21 intercept, could cover most of the selected targets in South China if weather permitted, except in SA-2 defended areas. He showed OXCART tracks for coverage of the Haiphong/Hanoi areas in North Vietnam which do not penetrate China but which do not cover all COMOR targets in North Vietnam. [REDACTED] then showed OXCART tracks with a minor penetration of China, estimated at 21 minutes, which could cover essentially all priority targets in North Vietnam. After indicating OXCART tracks to cover South China targets, [REDACTED] said that in approximately 2 or 3 successful OXCART missions, weather permitting, current coverage of these priority targets could be accomplished. He concluded his briefing by stating that using the OXCART would probably be the most economical means of achieving the required photography of the COMOR priority targets in South China and North Vietnam. In answer to questions by [REDACTED] said that U-2 routes designed to exclude SA-2 sites in South China would be programmed to cover about 134 of the 140 COMOR targets in South China.

7. [REDACTED] said that on the basis of the information just presented, COMOR had arrived at the Recommendations that had been circulated to the Board by USIB-D-41.14/287. The Chairman replied that this was a good place to start the discussion of this complicated question. [REDACTED] replied that the steady deterioration of the weather in the area is such that we should try to do the job within the next eight or ten weeks. Otherwise, the weather will not be suitable until about September or October.

8. The State Member then asked if he could be brought up to date on the [REDACTED] U-2 schedule. [REDACTED] replied that, weather permitting, the first mission could go on the 20th of March and the second mission on the 22nd, depending on the [REDACTED] priorities. Dr. Wheelon then explained that target priorities of the US are a subject of negotiation with [REDACTED] against their priorities. [REDACTED] replied that in paragraph 11 of the COMOR paper it is said that if the [REDACTED] was to be employed it could cover the bulk of the accessible targets in approximately 3 missions, but that 6 or 8 might be required in Category II or better weather to achieve substantially complete coverage of South China. He went on to say that if this is true it did not seem to him that we are up against such a tight timing problem. With 10 weeks to

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go and the maximum amount of good weather to be expected, most of the targets could be covered. [REDACTED] replied that reconnaissance is a risky business and that, despite predictions, it should be recognized that everything could go wrong. [REDACTED] said that he understood this but by the end of the month we should know if we have been successful in obtaining coverage. Dr. Wheelon replied that, of course, a lot depended on whether the [REDACTED] would fly the schedule. [REDACTED] replied that he was aware of the serious timing problem but he was not convinced that by failing to deploy OXCART this month we would lose the opportunity to obtain the necessary reconnaissance.

9. Dr. Wheelon said that timing for the deployment of OXCART was of concern in view of the likely 21 days required for deployment to which he knew the Director would add another 30 days. The Chairman added that from experience with aircraft, he felt strongly that the more that we rush to interject a new and complicated system like this into combat operations, the greater the risk would be of loss to enemy action or mechanical problems. The Acting NSA Member asked if the auxiliary and support equipment had been deployed and Dr. Wheelon replied that it had. Mr. Proctor said that if we followed the recommendation in paragraph 13. a., OXCART would be deployed. The Chairman suggested that this recommendation could be changed to read that the OXCART be deployed in a stand-by status.

10. The Director, DIA, said that in reality we have two problems of concern: the first involved the practical problem of deployment of the OXCART and the other the immediate exploitation of the [REDACTED] General Carroll went on to say he would not like to see the use of the OXCART and the U-2 tied up in a single package recommendation since they represented separate assets, and the urgent priority use of the U-2 should not be delayed pending a decision on deployment of the OXCART. Considering lead time requirement on deployment of the OXCART only the U-2 could take advantage of the comparatively good weather for the next month--hence his proposed change in the COMOR Recommendations, since it appears that the U-2, if vigorously employed, may have the capability of meeting our immediate requirements. He also stated that, while from an intelligence standpoint he supports the need for having the OXCART capability available in the area, it should be noted that our requirement is not just for one time data base coverage but for continuing reconnaissance surveillance of the critical areas. If it takes a month to deploy the OXCART we will be getting into May and June

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when the rapidly deteriorating weather will offer even the OXCART few opportunities for coverage. The Chairman replied that he believed this was a key point for, if we have the OXCART deployed, it could be used for quick reaction in June and July as weather permitted to optimize the well-expressed requirement for continuous observation. General Thomas said that he believed paragraph 13. a. should be rewritten to make clear that we recommend deployment of OXCART to stay out there for use on the target when weather conditions permit coverage. Dr. Wheelon said that the [REDACTED] the OXCART for continuing operations, but that we have not yet been told to deploy it. [REDACTED] thought that the policy makers would realize that the critical decision is whether to deploy it, because if the OXCART is deployed the compelling pressures would be irresistible to use the aircraft.

11. General Carroll said that he believed that the COMOR paper, as written, depreciates the practical capability of the U-2 as he noted that the paper attributes our coverage since December to satellites and drones without indicating that during a large part of this period the lack of U-2 coverage of South China was the result of a policy decision to stand-down. General Carroll pointed out that preceding this, in October to December, the U-2 had furnished approximately 75% of our reconnaissance coverage. Chairman concurred in General Carroll's proposal, that this stand-down should be reflected in a footnote in Tab A. of the paper.* [REDACTED] said that if the OXCART is deployed there would be greater pressure to employ the aircraft from the viewpoint of pilot safety. [REDACTED] replied that OXCART was clearly preferable to the SAC U-2 judged solely on the criteria of safety of U. S. pilots. [REDACTED] went on to say, however, that the problem with the paper is that it combines a North Vietnam rationale with a South China rationale. The paper accents our needs for OXCART over North Vietnam more than the policy makers have been led to expect. [REDACTED] noted that in the past, the use of OXCART had been stressed for China, while this paper highlights the need for using it to cover the Hanoi-Haiphong area and the lines of communication to the Chinese border. He pointed out that, from a policy viewpoint, the problem of using the OXCART over North Vietnam which the U. S. is already

* A revised first page of Tab A. including such a footnote is being circulated by a Memorandum for Holders of USIB-D-41.14/287.

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overflying is nothing like that involved in its use over China. [REDACTED] said using the OXCART in North Vietnam would only mean using another type of aircraft and in effect would indicate a de-escalation signal to the North Vietnamese since it could be interpreted that we did not intend to take out the SAM sites. In comparison, its use over China could be an escalation sign to the Chinese Communists. [REDACTED] believed it was misleading to combine the rationale regarding China with that concerning North Vietnam. He felt the paper would be more persuasive if these rationales were separated. [REDACTED] said that the COMOR paper was prepared to answer an intelligence problem and did not try to deal with possible political problems. [REDACTED] said that from the Watch Committee viewpoint he was deeply concerned over what the Chinese Communists are up to in North Vietnam and that our recent coverage does not furnish this information. He thought that we might be likely to see evidence of ChiCom intentions first in North Vietnam rather than in the border area in China.

12. General Davis said that he believed everything in the briefing validates the requirements as stated in the COMOR paper. Admiral Taylor said that he thought we should recommend use of the OXCART if it is determined that we cannot get the needed coverage from other resources and that the OXCART be deployed at the earliest practical time. The Chairman replied that we have permission to fly the [REDACTED] and that we should proceed with this. He noted that, if we do not succeed in obtaining coverage or a U-2 is shot down, we could then accelerate a decision to use the OXCART. In the interim, he said, we should deploy the aircraft at the earliest opportunity. He believed we should try to recommend a decision that would be acceptable to the policy makers and would still be likely to get the job done. General Thomas said that he supported the DIA change to paragraph 13.a. to deploy OXCART to provide a back-up capability if needed.

13. After some additional discussion, the Acting AEC Member and the CIA Member indicated that they supported the Recommendations as amended by the Director, DIA. The FBI Member said he would abstain as being outside his jurisdiction. Based on a suggestion by [REDACTED] the word "employed" in Recommendation c. was changed to "use as necessary." General Davis said that he still supported the need to use the OXCART immediately and that he wanted to include a footnote to that effect.

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14. After [REDACTED] and COMOR Members present prepared a redraft of Recommendations based on the above discussion, the Board then approved the actions circulated by USIB-D-41.14/288.

[REDACTED]
Executive Secretary

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